

WHITE RABBIT FUND

Westminster City Council

By email: neighbourhoodplanning@westminster.gov.uk

SOHO NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN CONSULTATION

White Rabbit Fund provides capital and advisory services to ambitious entrepreneurs within the hospitality industry. We work in close partnership with the following Soho businesses:

- Cricket restaurant on Denman Street
- Lina Stores delicatessen on Brewer Street
- Lina Stores restaurant on Greek Street.
- Island Poke restaurant on Kingly Street

We would be grateful for the City Council's consideration of our consultation response to the Soho Neighbourhood Plan. Even before the pandemic, high streets were suffering in a new world of online retailing and commerce. The outlook for high streets over the next 18 months is bleak. They will be decimated. It is vital to start developing longer term strategies and policies to create hubs of activity as an intersection of all human connectivity.

High streets need to focus on a new role of experience. They could transform into vital community and public health assets by providing places for people to connect socially and creatively. The move away from high street retail should focus on the concept of human interaction and in doing so contribute positively to the health and mental well being of the public. Places like Soho can be at the vanguard of this pioneering approach.

I hope and believe that Westminster can play its part in creating and regenerating Soho and surrounding high streets as one of these creative hubs attractive to workers, tourists and all the individuals and businesses that continue to contribute to Soho's world-renowned reputation.

If an appropriate balance is not struck between support for the hospitality and creative businesses against the sometimes conflicting views of local residents, Soho will die. I am particularly concerned that in a new world of "working from home" offices will be lost to residential development and the "Soho buzz" will peter out. Soho is so great because anyone can visit at any time of the week and it always has a positive buzz and energy. That is why people love it.

We therefore encourage the City Council to adopt the policies protecting and promoting individual creativity and businesses that contribute to the fabric of Soho. In particular, restaurants, live music venues, bars, nightclubs and private members clubs. Policies should welcome new licensed premises with more flexibility on hours and conditions of use. Private members clubs are particularly important hubs of creativity and Soho community.

We also support individual policies promoting openable shop fronts. In respect of our Soho businesses, an openable shop front allowing the low-key sale of salads, pasta and coffee could help generate a business-saving revenue scheme whilst also promoting a "Soho is open" image.

Similarly, more flexible policies on external seating could help many businesses survive whilst serving their customers in a safe and attractive environment. All of this can be done without harming the residential amenity, the vast majority of which believe choose to live in Soho because of its diverse creative and entertainment led businesses.

Thank you for taking into account my views.

